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# Fringing vegetation of the Swan-Canning river system

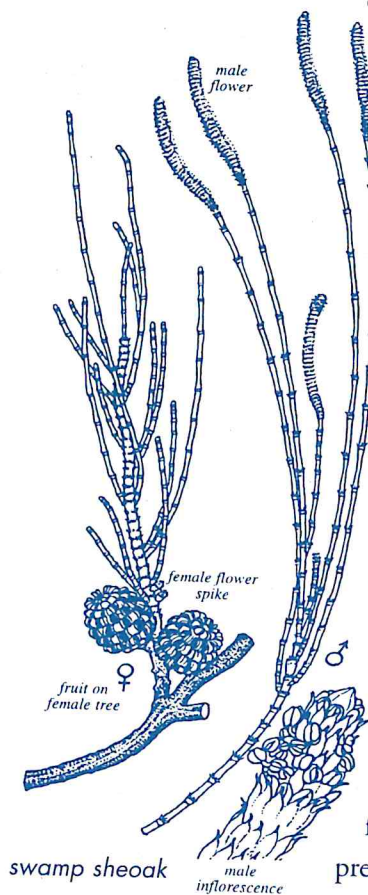
The Swan-Canning river system supports a variety of fringing plant types – trees, shrubs, sedges and rushes, samphires, herbs and grasses – and a number of different plant communities. Because the water in which fringing vegetation grows can be saline, brackish or fresh, a number of different types of plant communities are found.

Fringing plant communities exist on the river banks and on the strips of land along the banks. Salt marsh communities of salt-tolerant plants occur in areas subjected to tidal flooding. Upstream on higher land there may be a fringing forest community of salt-tolerant paperbarks and sheoaks. Still further back, in low-lying areas beyond the influence of salt water, freshwater paperbark and flooded gums may be found.

## The importance of fringing vegetation

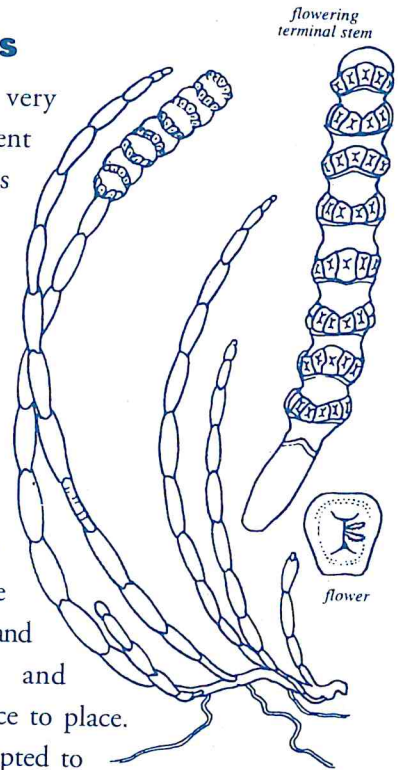
Healthy waterways are usually characterised by their fringing vegetation. All fringing plant communities are important to help maintain an ecologically balanced, healthy river system. The fringing vegetation of the Swan-Canning river system ensures the existence and

diversity of animals in the riverine environment as it provides food and shelter for birds, frogs, reptiles, mammals and other animals that live in or around the water. It also helps to filter water that enters the estuary, and to maintain the quality of other surface and ground-waters. Fringing vegetation has some ability to remove pollutants and to take up excess nutrients. It also stabilises and aerates sediments, prevents murkiness caused by floating sediments and prevents erosion of the banks.



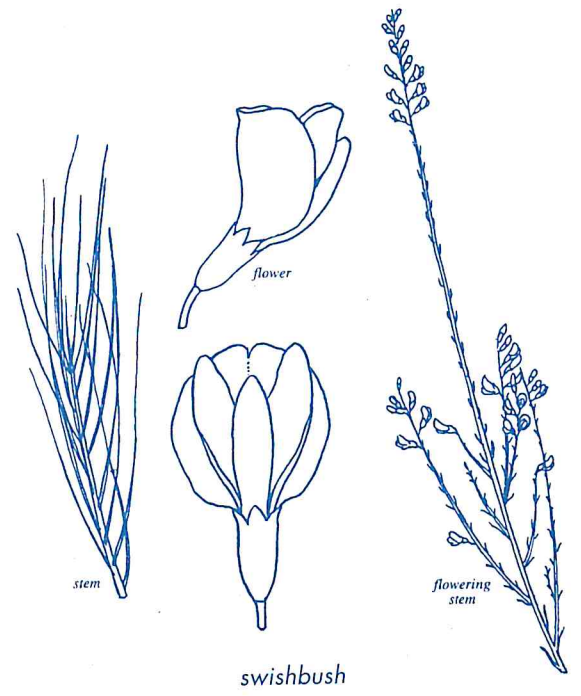
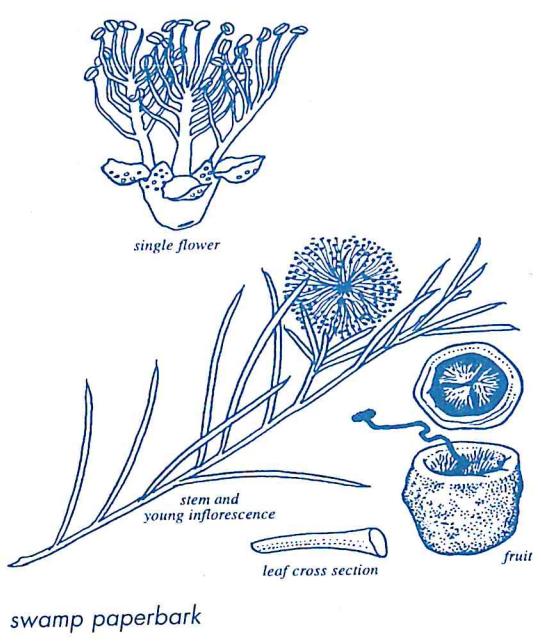
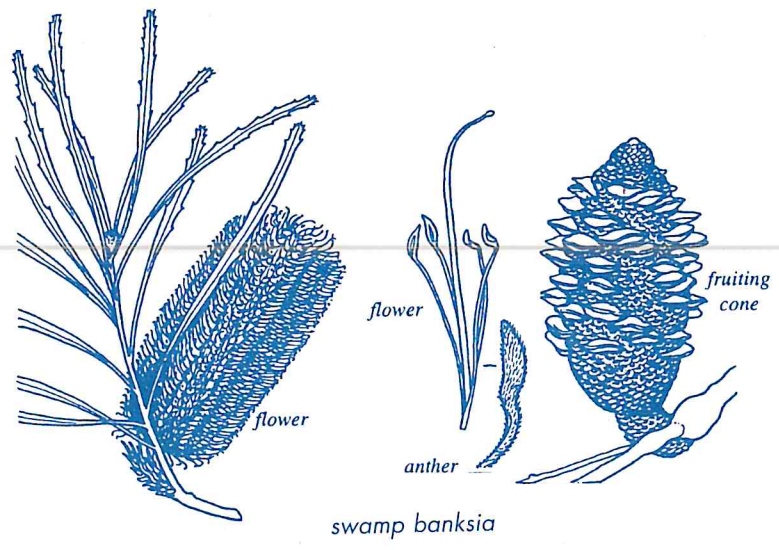
## Estuarine plants

The estuary is a very productive environment because it receives nutrients and sediments from the surrounding catchments. There are therefore a large number of native plant species. There is a wide range of habitats because of variations in the degree of inundation and the degree of waterlogging, and changes in nutrient and salinity levels from place to place. Fringing plants are adapted to the estuary's ever-changing environment. Many plants can tolerate seasonal inundation and waterlogging, and increasingly saline conditions over summer and autumn.



beaded samphire

The most common tree found in estuarine areas is the swamp sheoak. Shrubs include the saltbush, sea heath and slender myopium. There are many types of sedges and rushes that are important for bank stability. A number of samphires, including shrubby samphire and beaded samphire, and herbs such as trailing jointweed, brookweed, creeping brookweed and seablite, also inhabit the riparian zone of estuaries.






### Freshwater stream plants

There is a large variety in the type and distribution of plants found near freshwater streams due to different soil types and water depths, the timing and duration of flooding and the length of the dry period.

Some common trees include the peppermint, wattle, swamp banksia, river banksia, flooded gum, modong and swamp paperbark. Some common shrubs include the swamp peppermint, cojong, wonnich, astartea, variable-leaved grevillea, robin redbreast bush, narrow-leaved oxylobium, albizia and swishbush. There are many sedges and rushes found along freshwater streams, and the herb centella and the grass matgrass are also found.

*Further reading:*  
*Managing our Rivers - a guide to the nature and management of the streams of south-west Western Australia (Chapter 4: the value of fringing vegetation) by Dr Luke Pen, Water and Rivers Commission, 1999.*  
*Native vegetation of estuaries and saline waterways in south Western Australia, Water and Rivers Commission/Department of Conservation and Land Management, 1997.*  
*Native vegetation of freshwater rivers and creeks in south Western Australia, Water and Rivers Commission/Department of Conservation and Land Management, 1997.*

THIS RESOURCE SHEET IS ONE IN A SERIES ADAPTED FROM THE SWAN RIVER EDUCATION KIT, WATER AND RIVERS COMMISSION, 1999.  
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